



Community Energy Group Characterisations

**REPORT FOR NORTH WEST NET ZERO HUB
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FOR DIRECT ENQUIRIES ABOUT THIS REPORT:

REPORT FOR NORTH WEST NET ZERO HUB

Ailsa Gibson

Partner

CAG CONSULTANTS

Mobile: +447779586173

Email: ag@cagconsult.co.uk

CONTACT CAG CONSULTANTS:

CAG CONSULTANTS

150 Minories

London EC3N 1LS

Tel: 020 8555 6126

Fax: 020 7900 1868

hq@cagconsult.co.uk

www.cagconsultants.co.uk

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1 Introduction

The UK Community Energy Fund (CEF), administered by the five regional Net Zero Hubs, has been a significant driver of local clean energy initiatives from 2023 to 2025. With a total budget of £10 million, the fund has supported urban and rural communities in developing community energy projects, including renewable energy generation, electric vehicle initiatives, and energy efficiency schemes. The CEF has been instrumental in removing barriers to investment for community-scale projects, promoting local ownership of renewable assets, and supporting communities in reducing energy costs and generating income through locally-owned energy assets.

Such community energy initiatives as the CEF has funded are typically set up by volunteers in local communities to promote sustainable energy behaviours and help to facilitate a sustainable energy transition to Net Zero. There is however great diversity in what constitutes a community, the range of community energy projects being undertaken, the journeys communities are taking towards sustainability and the factors that shape those journeys.

Key questions that the Net Zero Hubs have wished to understand is what motivates people to get involved in community energy initiatives, what barriers they face in project development, what communications and outreach will most effectively engage with them, and what support is needed to develop and scale projects?

To answer this, this project has sought to develop community energy characterisations – typifying representatives of various types of community energy groups, and detailing their key characteristics, challenges and support needs.

The following outputs are presented:

- Summary of Community Energy Fund 2023 – 2025
- Overview of characterisations, similarities and differences
- Detailed characterisations of the four types of group
- Recommended resources for each type of group

Additional Appendices include:

- Methodology
- Decision tree for classifying groups

2 Community Energy Fund

The UK Community Energy Fund (CEF) was a £10 million programme running from 2023 – 2025 administered by the five regional Net Zero Hubs. Its goal was to support urban and rural communities in England to develop local clean energy projects, including renewable energy generation, electric vehicle initiatives, and energy efficiency schemes. The CEF provided grant funding for feasibility and development work, but not for capital installation.

CEF grants supported a range of community energy initiatives, including:

- Solar PV (rooftop and ground-mounted)
- Hydro power
- Wind power
- Biomass heat networks
- Heat pump-fed heat networks
- Solar thermal
- Electric vehicle charging points and car clubs
- Energy efficiency retrofit and advice projects

Two “stages” of grants were available:

- Stage 1 grants:** Up to £40,000 for feasibility studies and project scoping.
- Stage 2 grants:** Up to £100,000 for further development of investable community energy assets.

Over 160 grants were awarded across the five regions¹:

Table 1. CEF grants awarded by region 2023-25

Region	Number of Grants	Total Awarded
Greater South East	47	£2,185,270
South West	29	£1,253,749
Midlands	22	£1,078,748
North East	37	£1,524,200
North West	27	£1,115,145

CEF grants were primarily used for feasibility studies (technical, financial, legal, community consultation and engagement, development of business cases and investment-ready proposals and preparing for community fundraising and investment. The fund explicitly did not cover capital costs for installation, but aimed to bring projects to the point where they could attract further investment or funding for construction.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-net-zero-support-for-local-authorities-and-communities/community-energy-fund-projects-february-2025>

3 Overview of Characterisations

3.1 Introduction

The methodology followed to develop these characterisations is summarised in Appendix 1 Methodology.

As a result of this process four characterisations were developed, which are explored in detail in 4:

- **Emerging Community Energy Group**
New, volunteer-led, learning as they go, no paid staff.
- **Developing Community Energy Group**
Some projects delivered, growing, mostly volunteers, aspiring to professionalise.
- **Established Community Energy Group**
Multiple projects, paid staff, robust governance, sector leaders.
- **Other Community Group**
Main focus is not community energy, but may be considering or already running small energy projects as a side activity.

A decision tree to allow quick categorisation of groups is provided in Appendix 2.

Through the data analysis and testing of the draft community energy group characterisations, some key characteristic categories emerged where there were distinct differences between the four characterisations. These are:

- The primary focus of the group
- The typical motivations of members of the group
- Key challenges the group faces
- Key skills within the group
- The groups primary support needs
- The groups staffing model/maturity
- The typical scale of projects undertaken by the group
- The perception within the group of its energy expertise

Details of the differences between the characterisations are shown in table 2.

A summary of key differences can be found in 3.23.2.

A number of key commonalities were also identified across all four characterisations . These can be found in section 3.3.

Table 2. Key Characteristics per group

Characteristic	Emerging CE Group	Developing CE Group	Established CE Group	Other Community Group
Primary Focus	Dedicated to initiating community energy projects.	Dedicated to growing/scaling community energy projects.	Dedicated to sustaining and expanding established community energy operations.	Broader community activities; energy is an additional means to support existing mission.
Typical Motivations	Local climate action, community benefit, visible impact, personal interest in sustainability.	Tangible local benefits (e.g., installations), giving back, visible difference, environmental responsibility.	Community benefit, climate action, achievement/legacy, empowerment, just transition.	Improve facilities/services, cost reduction, revenue generation, climate concern (ancillary), responsive to opportunity.
Key Challenges	Knowledge gaps (technical/commercial), finding support, volunteer capacity/burnout, complexity.	Scaling up projects, administrative burden, funding/resource gaps, specialist skills gaps, first project complications.	Recruitment/succession, diversity/inclusion, financial/technical complexity, sustaining momentum, bureaucracy, capital funding.	Lack of energy expertise, capacity/time, administrative burden, project deliverability, caution about complex projects.
Key Skills Held	Diverse professional backgrounds, new to energy specifics, value learning.	Professional skills (project management, finance), multitasking, recognize need for external specialists.	High professionalism, governance, formal roles, often secure external professional support.	Practical volunteer skills, professional backgrounds (non-energy), little technical energy background, willing to learn.

Primary Support Needs	Practical/personal guidance, technical education, model legal/commercial documents, peer networking.	Grant funding (early-stage/feasibility), access to professional expertise, ongoing admin support, mentoring/peer support.	Revenue funding (capacity building), practical templates/model documents, procurement/admin guidance, capital funding.	Clear/accessible information, funding process guidance, personal support/mentoring, governance/legal clarity, trusted expertise.
Staffing Model/Maturity	Volunteer-based, no paid staff.	Voluntary basis, limited/no paid staff, aspires to paid roles.	May have employed roles, seeks revenue funding for staff.	Volunteer-based, time-poor, may have physical assets.
Typical Project Scale	Small, initial projects; learning phase.	Transitioning from small to larger, more complex ventures.	Managing complex, larger-scale projects; sustaining existing operations.	Often small-scale, facility-focused; cautious about large/complex.
Self-Perception of Energy Expertise	Inexperienced, "naive," unsure where to start, "first-timers."	Professional skills but acknowledge specialist gaps, recognize need for professional management.	High professionalism, evolving from activism to business models.	Do not see themselves as "community energy experts," feel out of depth.

3.2 Key Differences

Stage of Development: Ranges from emerging groups with little experience to established groups managing complex projects.

Skills and Experience: Some groups bring strong professional backgrounds (finance, project management, energy), while others rely more on practical, volunteer experience.

Focus and Motivation: Some focus primarily on community assets (e.g., village halls), others on climate action or innovation.

Support Needs: Vary from basic templates and mentoring (emerging groups) to advanced governance, succession planning, and funding for staff (established groups).

Demographics: Most groups are older and less diverse, but the extent and recognition of this varies.

3.3 Key Commonalities

Locally Rooted: All groups are locally rooted and driven by a strong sense of community identity and place.

Shared Motivations: community benefit, local empowerment, addressing climate change, and improving local facilities or services.

Democracy: Operate on democratic, participatory principles-emphasizing collective decision-making and ownership.

Challenges: Face challenges with volunteer capacity, technical complexity, and funding.

Support Needs: Value peer learning, practical support, and accessible guidance.

4 Detailed Characterisations

4.1 Member of an Established Community Energy Group

4.1.1 Summary

A typical member of a well-established community energy group is motivated by a desire to benefit their local community, address climate change, and ensure a just transition to renewable energy. They bring significant skills and commitment and may be either:

- Middle-aged to older local residents, often with a professional background in fields like finance, project management, or energy – these are often in more rural community energy groups. They have often been volunteering over many years, and value strong governance and accountability within the group. The group is likely to be predominantly white and middle-class, with a gender-balanced leadership but limited socioeconomic and age diversity. Succession, inclusivity, and sustainability are ongoing concerns, as is maintaining the group's professional reputation and local embeddedness.
- Younger individuals, who may have an employed, or volunteer role within the group – these are often in more urban community energy groups. The group is likely to have a mix of age, genders, ethnicities and socioeconomic diversity and may have employed roles within the organisation.

4.1.2 Background and Community Connection

- Likely to be a resident of the local area, with a strong sense of connection to place and community and motivated by the desire to give back locally. In rural groups, they are likely to be a long-term local resident.
- Often possesses professional experience or expertise relevant to the group's activities, such as project management, finance/accounting, energy consultancy, public sector roles, or technical backgrounds. In rural groups, many are retired or semi-retired professionals, bringing significant skills from previous careers. In urban groups, many are employed/working and bring skills from their current work to the group.
- Frequently involved in other local voluntary or sustainability initiatives before joining or founding the community energy group, such as low-carbon groups, environmental forums, or local action networks.

4.1.3 Demographics

- **Age:**
 - Rural community energy core group members tend to be older, often in their late 40s to 70s or even 80s. There is a noted concern about the aging demographic and the challenge of recruiting younger people.
 - Urban community energy core group members tend to be more mixed in ages, with more younger to middle age individuals.
- **Gender:** Groups strive for gender balance, and many have near parity among staff and board members.
- **Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status:**
 - Leadership of rural community energy groups are predominantly white, male and middle-class, with limited socioeconomic diversity. This is acknowledged as a challenge and an area for improvement.
 - Membership and leadership of urban community energy groups is a mix of ethnicities, genders and are more socioeconomically diverse.
- **Locality:**

Many directors and volunteers have personal ties to local institutions (e.g., their children attended the schools that host solar panels).

- Members of rural community energy groups almost always live locally; involvement from outside the immediate area is rare.
- Members of urban community energy groups often live locally, but may also have involvement of individuals from outside the local area.

4.1.4 Motivations (summary)

- Driven by a mix of motivations, including:
 - Desire to address climate change and advance the energy transition, especially through tangible, local action.
 - Strong commitment to community benefit, ensuring that projects deliver social and financial returns for the local area, not just environmental gains.
 - Personal pride in creating something positive and lasting in their locality-often more important than financial returns.
 - Interest in ensuring a just transition, bringing the community along and embedding projects in local priorities.

- Some members are motivated less by climate or energy per se and more by the opportunity to generate resources for their community or to support local institutions.

4.1.5 Motivations (detailed)

1. **Community Benefit**

- Members are strongly motivated by the desire to generate tangible benefits for their local community, such as reducing energy bills for schools or community buildings, increasing energy resilience, reducing fuel poverty and reinvesting profits from energy generation into local projects.

2. **Climate Action**

- A major driver is the commitment to tackling climate change through practical, local action-installing renewables, reducing carbon emissions, and demonstrating what is possible at a community scale.

3. **Sense of Achievement and Legacy**

- Many express pride in creating something lasting and positive for their locality, such as solar installations or energy efficiency projects that will benefit future generations.

4. **Empowerment and Local Control**

- There is a strong belief in the value of local ownership and control over energy resources, rather than leaving it to large, distant corporations.

5. **Learning and Personal Growth**

- Members mention enjoying the opportunity to learn new skills, work with like-minded people, and contribute their expertise in a meaningful way – including supporting other developing/emerging community energy groups.

4.1.6 Challenges (summary)

- Concerned about succession planning and the sustainability of the group as core members age and as projects grow in scale and complexity. This is more prevalent for rural groups.
- Aware of the need for robust governance and financial management, especially as the sector expands and attracts more public and member investment.

- Sees the need for more diversity and younger people to join, but finds it challenging to recruit beyond existing networks.

4.1.7 Challenges (detailed)

1. Recruitment and Succession

- A recurring concern is the difficulty in attracting new, and for rural groups - younger, members and volunteers where the core group tends to be older, and there is anxiety about who will take over as current members step back.
- For groups that have paid roles, there are challenges in recruiting staff with the right experience at the rates they are able to pay.

2. Diversity and Inclusion

- Members recognise the lack of diversity (age, ethnicity, socioeconomic background) in their groups and see this as both a weakness and a challenge to overcome.

3. Financial and Technical Complexity

- As projects grow in scale, managing complex financial, legal, and technical aspects becomes more demanding. Members sometimes feel stretched by the need for specialist knowledge.

4. Sustaining Momentum

- Keeping up enthusiasm and volunteer energy over the long term, especially after the initial excitement of launching a project, is challenging.

5. Navigating Bureaucracy

- Members mention frustration with regulatory hurdles, lengthy approval processes, and the need to comply with complex rules around energy generation and community share offers.

6. Balancing Professionalism and Volunteerism

- There is an ongoing tension between maintaining high standards of governance and accountability while relying on unpaid volunteers with limited time.

7. Access to Funding

- Securing grants, loans, or community investment is an ongoing challenge, especially as initial sources dry up or as competition for funding increases.

- Application windows for funding are often short and not widely promoted, so funding opportunities can be missed.

8. Community Engagement

- Effectively engaging the wider community, beyond the “usual suspects,” and ensuring projects reflect local needs and priorities can be difficult.

4.1.8 Skills Held and Roles Played

- Brings a high level of professionalism and governance to the group, often holding formal positions such as chair, treasurer, or project manager.
- Volunteers significant time, sometimes over many years, and may take on multiple roles as needed (e.g., financial oversight, project development, community engagement).
- Recognises the need for, and sometimes secures, external professional support for specialist tasks (e.g., legal, technical, or accountancy services).
- Values and benefits from peer mentoring and knowledge-sharing with other community energy groups, often both receiving and providing such support.

4.1.9 Support Needs

1. Revenue Funding for Capacity Building

Revenue grants that allow groups to hire staff or pay for project development time are crucial. Many groups have long been reliant on volunteers in the early stages, but these lack the time or resources to maintain a more established group. Paid staff or funded hours make it possible to identify and develop viable larger scale and longer-term projects.

2. Access to Practical Templates and Model Documents

There is a strong desire for freely available, high-quality resources such as model financial spreadsheets, template contracts (e.g., heads of terms for landowners, EPC contracts), and example governance documents. This would reduce the need for each group to pay for bespoke legal or financial advice, saving costs and speeding up project development.

3. Guidance on Procurement and Administration

Specifically in relation to CEF, groups need clearer guidance and support on procurement processes and administrative requirements. Some found current processes overly complex and suggested that more user-friendly instructions and templates would help.

4. Capital Funding to take projects to construction

Especially for larger projects, e.g. community solar farms.

4.1.10 Their Understanding of Community Energy

They see community energy as rooted in local action, community benefit, and participation, but also as requiring professionalism and financial sustainability (“*not a charity*”, evolving from activism to robust, community-led business models.

4.1.11 They Might Say... (paraphrased from interview transcripts)

- *“It’s not always easy to find people with the right skills who are willing to give their time.”*
- *“We want to make sure the benefits stay local and help the people who need it most.”*
- *“Sometimes it feels like there’s a mountain of paperwork before you can even get started.”*
- *“I’m proud that we’ve managed to do something real about climate change, right here in our own town.”*
- *“We’re all getting older, and we need new blood to keep things going.”*

4.2 Member of a Developing Community Energy Group

4.2.1 Summary

A typical member of a well-developing community energy group is a long-standing, locally committed individual—often middle-aged or older—who brings professional skills and a strong sense of community pride. They are motivated by making a tangible, positive impact in their area, value collaboration and learning, and are willing to volunteer significant time and effort. They face challenges with scaling up, recruiting new members, and ensuring strong governance, but are pragmatic, resourceful, and deeply rooted in their community.

4.2.2 Background and Community Connection

- Deeply rooted in the local area, often with decades-long ties and involvement in other local initiatives (e.g., food, cycling, biodiversity, or environmental groups).
- Likely to have a strong sense of local pride and a commitment to ensuring benefits remain within the community.

4.2.3 Demographics

- **Age:** Typically, middle-aged or older, reflecting the demographic of the local area; younger members are rare and hard to recruit.
- **Locality:** Group members are overwhelmingly local, with most directors and volunteers living in or closely connected to the area.
- **Diversity:** Gender and ethnic diversity may be limited, with a tendency toward a homogenous group that mirrors the local population.

4.2.4 Motivations (summary)

- Primarily motivated by creating tangible local benefits—such as renewable energy installations on schools or community buildings, fostering community pride and reducing community energy use and costs.
- Motivated by a desire to give back and make a visible, positive difference in their own community, rather than personal financial gain or external recognition.

4.2.5 Motivations (detailed)

1. **Community Benefit:** Members are primarily motivated by the desire to make a tangible, positive impact in their own community. The focus is on “giving something back” and creating projects that local people can be proud of, rather than on financial returns or broader energy sector ambitions. Reducing energy use and saving money is sometimes their initial starting point for getting involved with community energy.
2. **Visible, Lasting Change:** There is a strong drive to see visible outcomes-such as solar panels on local schools or community buildings-that demonstrate progress and foster a sense of achievement among residents.
3. **Personal Connection:** Most members have deep local roots, and many have children who attended the schools benefiting from projects. The motivation is described as “parochial”-about helping their own place and people.
4. **Environmental Responsibility:** While not always the primary motivator, there is a shared sense of responsibility to reduce carbon emissions and contribute to climate action at a local level.

4.2.6 Challenges (summary)

- Operates mainly on a voluntary basis, with limited or no paid staff; aspires to secure sustainable funding for core roles in the future.
- Faces challenges in scaling up from small grant-funded projects to larger, more complex ventures requiring significant investment and professional management.
- Concerned about governance, sector reputation, and ensuring the group is run professionally and transparently.

4.2.7 Challenges (detailed)

1. **Scaling Up and Project Complexity:** Moving from small, grant-funded projects (like school solar) to larger ventures (such as solar farms) is a major challenge. Larger projects require millions in investment, complex planning processes, and specialist expertise that go beyond the group’s volunteer capacity.
2. **Administrative Burden:** The lack of funding for ongoing administration and project management means that most work is done voluntarily. Groups aspire to have paid support for essential functions but cannot sustain this with current revenue.
3. **Funding and Resource Gaps:** Securing the necessary funding for feasibility, planning, and technical studies is a persistent challenge. Grant funding is

essential, as it is not feasible to ask local people to invest in speculative or early-stage projects.

4. **Skills Gaps and Professional Support:** Even groups with strong professional backgrounds encounter gaps in specialist knowledge (e.g., legal, technical, ecological surveys) and must pay for external consultants. There is a recognition that not all groups can rely on in-house skills.
5. **First Project Challenges:** There are likely to be complications with the first project, given the group is often on a steep learning curve. It can then be challenging to get further funding to fix any issues and can lead to volunteer burn out. Group members may feel isolated during this period.
6. **Understanding local authority structures:** Groups would welcome support to help navigate the complexity of local authority structures, for example the need to get ‘buy-in’ and approvals across different teams.

4.2.8 Skills Held and Roles Played

- Brings relevant professional skills to the group, such as project management, finance, consultancy, or public sector experience.
- Often multitasking across roles, such as communications, fundraising, technical oversight, and project management.
- Recognises the value of specialist expertise and is willing to seek external support for technical, legal, or financial matters when needed.

4.2.9 Support Needs

1. Grant Funding for Early-Stage and Feasibility Work

Grant funding for feasibility studies, planning applications, legal agreements, and technical surveys are key at this stage. Groups cannot ask local people to invest in speculative or unproven projects, so upfront grant support is essential.

2. Access to Professional and Specialist Expertise

Even groups with strong internal skills need to pay for external consultants for specialist work-such as ecology surveys, technical assessments, legal documentation, and commercialisation advice. For larger projects, the need for professional project management and accountancy support increases, as *“you can’t expect volunteers to manage something of this scale... it’s not a part-time job”*.

3. Ongoing Administrative and Project Management Support

There is a desire to have a regular, paid administrative or management contract to handle day-to-day operations, such as maintaining solar installations, filing returns,

and overseeing inspections. Support is needed for the group to become an employer. External technical support and guidance is also welcomed, e.g. on how to conduct project risk assessments and what good procurement looks like.

4. Mentoring and Peer Support

Mentoring from more experienced groups can give confidence, practical advice, and access to templates and resources. Using templates, spreadsheets, and sample documents shared by other groups will save time and avoid reinventing the wheel.

5. Pre (funding) application advice

Advice to help groups ‘hone’ their project proposals and maximise likelihood of success before submitting an application.

6. Understanding local authority/power sector organisation structures: Groups would welcome support to help navigate the complexity of local authority/power sector organisation structures, for example the need to get ‘buy-in’ and approvals across different teams.

4.2.10 Their Understanding of Community Energy

Deeply local, collective endeavour focused on practical benefits, empowerment, and visible improvements for the community-rooted in place, pride, and local decision-making, rather than just technical or environmental goals.

4.2.11 They Might Say... (paraphrased from transcripts)

“It’s about seeing something happen in your local place that you can feel proud of. Everyone involved is local and personally invested in the community, not for financial returns but for the benefit of the area.”

4.3 Member of an Emerging Community Energy Group

4.3.1 Summary

A typical member of an emerging community energy group is a community-minded, locally invested volunteer-often with experience in other local initiatives-who brings a mix of life and professional skills but is new to the technical and commercial aspects of community energy. They are pragmatic, collaborative, and driven by a strong sense of place and community benefit, but face challenges around knowing where to start and where to find support, complexity, time, knowledge/skills gaps of the energy landscape. They value practical support, peer learning, and personal guidance to help their group succeed. The group is unlikely to have any paid staff.

4.3.2 Background and Community Connection

- A long-term resident of a community, often with deep roots and a strong sense of local identity.
- Already active in other local voluntary or community projects (e.g., repair cafes, food pantries, biodiversity initiatives), demonstrating a commitment to improving local resilience and sustainability.
- Motivated by a desire to address climate change and deliver tangible benefits for their community, but with a distinctly local focus.

4.3.3 Demographics

- Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status: The group reflects the local demographic.
- Membership is primarily local and volunteer-based, with a small core of active volunteers running projects.
- There is social diversity in the community, but the group does not systematically track demographic data.

4.3.4 Motivations (summary)

- Strongly motivated by the opportunity to make a visible, positive impact in their locality-such as installing solar panels or running energy-saving initiatives.
- Seeks to create community benefit, not just environmental impact, and values the reassurance and credibility provided by formal structures like a Community Benefit Society.

- Enjoys the sense of collective achievement and the variety of projects that bring different people together for different reasons.

4.3.5 Motivations (detailed)

1. **Local Climate Action and Community Benefit:** The core motivations are to mitigate the effects of climate change locally and to deliver tangible benefits to their own community, such as reducing carbon impacts, increasing biodiversity, and strengthening community resilience.
2. **Personal Interests:** Members are involved for a range of reasons, including interest in nature, biodiversity, food growing, repair cafes, and social projects. The community energy project is one of several initiatives, and different members are drawn to different aspects, reflecting a broad-based commitment to local improvement.
3. **Pragmatism and Feasibility:** Project choices are motivated by what is realistically achievable given local conditions and community appetite. For example, for renewable energy generation projects, solar may be chosen over wind or hydro due to perceived local opposition and practical simplicity.

4.3.6 Challenges (summary)

- Open about being inexperienced or “naive” in the specifics of energy projects and where to start, actively seeks out help, templates, and mentoring from more established groups.
- Finds the process demanding and sometimes overwhelming, especially given the complexity of legal agreements, commercial negotiations, and the time commitment required from volunteers.
- Faces barriers such as complex landlord-tenant relationships, the need for specialist legal and technical knowledge, and the risk of volunteer burnout.

4.3.7 Challenges (detailed)

- **Knowing where to find support and where to start:** There is a lot of support out there, but it can be difficult to find/know who to approach first and can be confusing/overwhelming on knowing where to start.
- **Commercial, Technical Inexperience and lack of knowledge of the energy landscape:** Group members acknowledge a lack of commercial experience and naivety in business and technical aspects of energy projects. This includes uncertainty around commercial deals, technical requirements, and legal

arrangements, making the process slow and challenging. They also lack knowledge of the existing energy landscape.

- **Volunteer Capacity and Burnout:** The work is demanding and time-consuming, relying entirely on volunteers. There is a risk of burning out the small pool of active members, which sometimes slows progress.
- **Funding Process and Timelines:** (CEF specific) The application process is lengthy, sometimes misaligned with project timelines, and can create periods of inactivity followed by rushed activity to meet deadlines. Rolling or more continuous funding would be preferred to rounds.

4.3.8 Skills Held and Roles Played

- Brings a diverse mix of professional backgrounds to the group, such as industrial chemistry, education, law, accountancy, landscape architecture, or energy sales.
- While some members have relevant skills in project management, tendering, or legal matters, most are new to the technical, business, and regulatory aspects of community energy projects.
- Values learning and is candid about knowledge gaps, particularly regarding commercial arrangements, technical detail, and the complexities of delivering energy projects.

4.3.9 Support Needs

Would benefit from structured mentoring, technical education, and continuity in funding and support.

1. **Access to Practical Support and Guidance:** Values clear, accessible guidance, practical templates, and “*a friend to ring up*” - preferring practical, personal support over generic online resources. While there is a lot of information available, it is often overwhelming and not tailored to the needs of first-time or inexperienced groups. Would like one place to access/signpost them to support and resources.
2. **Technical Education:** Members want better access to technical education and plain-language explanations about the energy sector, grid, and commercial arrangements, to build confidence and competence in project delivery.
3. **Model Legal and Commercial Documents:** Groups need access to template documents for key agreements, such as Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), roof leases, and exclusivity agreements. These would allow groups to adapt rather than create from scratch or pay high legal fees: “*It’s crazy for us to have to*

spend £50,000 on legal people... I'm pretty sure every project does the same sort of thing."

4. **Peer Networking and Knowledge Sharing:** Groups value the ability to learn from more experienced community energy groups and want opportunities for structured knowledge sharing, mentoring, and informal advice to avoid repeating common mistakes. This is particularly important during the planning and delivery of the groups first project.
5. **Business Development and Commercial Skills:** There is a skills gap around business development, commercial negotiation. Groups would benefit from support or training in these areas to complement their existing expertise.
6. **CEF Specific Support:** Groups would appreciate extended applications windows as the deadlines for funding applications have felt too short, requiring groups to jump through challenging hurdles in a limited time. Groups also noted that it is challenging for small groups to maintain momentum if there are long delays in funding processes.

4.3.10 Their Understanding of Community Energy

Local, collective action to develop renewable energy projects that deliver tangible benefits for the community-whether through direct energy provision or generating income for local purposes. The emphasis is on local ownership, decision-making, and ensuring that the benefits remain within the community.

4.3.11 They Might Say... (paraphrased from transcripts)

"A big barrier for us is just not knowing what we don't know. We're learning as we go, and it's slow and sometimes painful. Most of us are first-timers when it comes to energy projects."

"There's a lot of information out there, but it's overwhelming. What we really need is a simple set of signposts or a handbook that tells us where to go for each bit of advice."

"It would be so helpful to have template documents-like model PPAs and roof leases-so we don't have to spend a fortune on legal fees for things every group needs."

"Sometimes you just want a friend to ring up who's done it before, someone who can give you practical advice at the right moment."

4.4 Member of an Other Community Group

4.4.1 Summary

A typical member of an established community group/organisation who may be considering starting a community energy project is a trusted, long-term local volunteer who is deeply invested in their community's wellbeing. They are motivated by a mix of community service, practical needs, and climate concern, and are willing to learn and collaborate to deliver tangible benefits for their area. They are practical, collaborative, and motivated by the desire to improve local facilities or services.

While not an energy expert, they are open to new ideas and willing to learn if the benefits to their group are clear. They may lack awareness of the full potential that community energy offers - busy community groups don't know what they don't know.

These individuals bring organisational skills, pragmatism, and a commitment to making things happen, but often feel challenged by technical, administrative, and capacity barriers. They value straightforward support, tangible outcomes, and often juggle energy work with other community responsibilities.

Their community group may have a site and physical assets they could use for a community energy project, or may not. They may be formally constituted as a group, or may not.

4.4.2 Background and Community Connection

- Likely to be a long-term resident with deep roots in the community, already active in local initiatives such as village halls, sports clubs, faith groups, or residents' associations.
- Frequently holds a formal or semi-formal role (e.g., trustee, chair, treasurer, subcommittee lead) in the organisation, sometimes spanning multiple groups.
- Known and trusted within community, often with a reputation for "getting things done" on local issues unrelated to energy. Often described as part of the "*great and good*" or "*fabric of the community*."

4.4.3 Demographics

- **Reflects Local Group:** Age, gender, and background typically mirror those of the wider community group-often middle-aged or older, with a mix of professional and practical experience.

4.4.4 Motivations (summary)

- Members may be motivated by community spirit, financial prudence, environmental concern, or simply a desire to help out.
- Reducing energy costs for their community building(s) and/or generating revenue to support their services. Also providing energy advice and retrofit projects to assist community members with energy costs.
- May have been inspired by successful examples from other villages or groups, and keen to pilot or showcase new approaches for broader benefit.

4.4.5 Motivations (detailed)

- **Community Benefit:** Main motivation is to improve facilities or services for local people - a desire to “give something back” and leave a positive legacy for the community.
- **Reducing Costs and Generating Revenue:** Sees community energy projects as a practical way to support the group’s core mission-such as lowering bills, generating income, securing the future of a valued community asset or to provide income to support other, often seen as primary, activities of the group/community.
- **Climate Concern:** Climate action and reducing the local carbon footprint are important, but often sit alongside other drivers like energy security, local economic resilience, and community wellbeing.
- **Responsive to Opportunity:** Often motivated by a specific opportunity (e.g., a grant, a local installer’s offer, or rising energy costs) rather than a strategic plan for energy transition.

4.4.6 Challenges (summary)

- Balances energy work with other group responsibilities; often volunteers with limited time and competing priorities, but highly committed to seeing projects through.
- Limited internal expertise on energy and climate issues, as well as a shortage of time and capacity among volunteers or staff to take on new projects.
- While there is community interest in energy and climate work, groups often feel unsure about how to move from information-sharing and signposting to more active or technical involvement.
- Do not see themselves as “community energy experts” and often feel out of their depth with technical jargon, grant processes, or complex feasibility studies.

- Experience frustration with funding application processes, administrative burdens, and the need to monitor consultants or external partners.

4.4.7 Challenges (detailed)

- **Lack of Resources and Expertise:** Limited internal expertise on energy and climate issues, as well as a shortage of time and capacity among volunteers or staff to take on new projects. This is compounded by the challenge of recruiting new trustees or volunteers with the necessary skills or passion to drive energy activities forward.
- **Lack of Technical and Administrative Expertise:** While groups often have strong professional backgrounds (finance, education, healthcare, project management), they frequently lack specialist knowledge in energy, legal, or technical fields. This leads to uncertainty in monitoring consultants, managing feasibility studies, and understanding technical jargon and processes.
- **Administrative Burden:** Reporting requirements and project management for funded projects can be complicated and not always suited to groups with limited experience or capacity.
- **Difficulty Accessing Trusted Technical Support:** Finding and working with suitable consultants for technical studies or building improvements is challenging, especially when groups lack prior experience in this area.
- **Project Deliverability:** There is uncertainty about the scale and viability of proposed projects, especially when feasibility studies suggest options that seem too large or expensive for the community to realistically deliver.
- **Cautious about taking on complex projects:** They may have spent many years developing trust with a community, and are not willing to risk that if benefits aren't really clear, or support is not available.

4.4.8 Skills Held and Roles Played

- Brings practical skills from volunteer work-organising events, managing local facilities, fundraising, or running community services.
- Often brings a professional background in fields such as finance, education, healthcare, engineering, project management, law, or business.
- Typically has little or no technical background in energy, but is willing to learn and seek advice from others.
- Used to working as part of a committee or team, balancing multiple community priorities.

- Some are retired or semi-retired, or working part-time, with others in full-time work. The group benefits from a broad mix of practical and professional skills.
- See themselves as practical doers: “go-getters” who want to get things done for their community, even if it means learning new skills or navigating unfamiliar territory.

4.4.9 Support Needs

1. External Support

Looks for clear, simple guidance and trusted partners (e.g., local authorities, energy co-ops, or consultants) to help navigate technical and legal details.

2. Clear, Accessible Information and Guidance

There is a strong desire for practical, easily understood information and guidance. This includes written materials, guides, or case studies tailored to non-experts, as well as templates for progress reports and application forms that avoid unnecessary jargon or complexity.

3. Guidance Navigating Funding and Grant Processes

There is a strong need for clearer, more accessible guidance on eligibility checklists/criteria and completing funding applications and managing grant requirements. Members describe application forms as full of jargon, with unclear or piecemeal requests for information that create confusion and frustration. [CEF specific] A checklist of what’s needed at each stage, and upfront clarity about requirements, would be highly valued.

3. Personal Support and Mentoring

Values direct, personal support-such as being able to “pitch” ideas to funding officers, receive feedback, or access one-to-one advice and mentoring. They note that personal contact with funders or experienced groups gave them the confidence to proceed with applications and projects.

4. Clarity on Governance and Legal Structures

As projects grow, groups need guidance on the most appropriate legal structures for handling funds and managing risk, especially when large grants are involved. Advice on governance, accountability, and financial oversight is sought to ensure transparency and confidence.

5. Capacity Building and Training

There is a need for training opportunities for staff, volunteers, and community members, particularly around technical, project management, and engagement skills. This includes carbon literacy and energy efficiency training.

6. Peer Networking and Local Connections

Groups are aware of the benefit of connecting with other organisations that have already delivered similar projects, to learn from their experiences and avoid reinventing the wheel. They see value in site visits, networking, and sharing good practice.

7. Access to Trusted, Practical Expertise

There is a desire for support from knowledgeable advisors who can provide practical, tailored advice-ideally someone to “call on” for guidance as issues arise. Groups value peer learning, mentoring, and the ability to share resources or case studies with other similar organisations.

4.4.10 Their Understanding of Community Energy

They may see community energy as an emerging, somewhat unfamiliar concept that is best understood as part of their wider mission to support, inform, and empower their local community. For them, community energy is less about technical projects and more about engagement, information, inclusion, and supporting local needs - whether through signposting, advice, or practical improvements to community assets.

4.4.11 They Might Say... (paraphrased from transcripts)

“We’re really a hub for all sorts of community activity, and while we know people are interested in climate and energy, we mostly share information and signpost to other sources rather than run energy projects ourselves.”

“We see energy work as just another way of looking after our community assets and making sure they’re sustainable for the future.”

“It’s about reducing our reliance on oil and cutting costs for places like the pool or village hall, so they’re here for the next generation.”

“We have a good mix of professional skills-finance, planning, building-but we’re time poor and stretched across lots of other voluntary roles. It’s hard to take on something this big without more support.”

“We’d love more opportunities to learn from other villages or groups who’ve already done this-short case studies, practical examples, and maybe a network to share experiences.”

“Applying for funding can be overwhelming, especially with all the jargon and technical requirements. Having someone to talk to, or pitch ideas to, really helps build our confidence.”

“We’d love to do more, but volunteer time is always stretched thin, so it’s hard to take on new projects without more support or resources.”

4.4.12 Additional Information on this Characterisation:

Volunteer Capacity

- **Capacity and Volunteer Time:** Members are often already heavily involved in other community roles (e.g., parish council, charity trusteeship, running local facilities) and describe themselves as “time poor.” Some are retired or semi-retired but still balancing multiple voluntary commitments, making it difficult to take on complex new projects.
- **Succession and Continuity:** Key individuals often drive projects forward, and there is concern about what happens if those people who had a strong interest in energy and drove a CE project were to step back or leave, risking loss of momentum or expertise.
- **Volunteer Burnout and Competing Priorities:** Volunteers are often already stretched delivering the core/primary activities of the group, making it hard to take on new community energy initiatives or even to call out for more help.

Considerations for Groups with Physical Sites/Assets

- **Negotiating with a landlord:** Groups that lease their buildings have additional layers of complexity when delivering community energy projects.
- **Heritage buildings:** Some groups lease/own older/heritage buildings, which may lead to more considerations and challenges when delivering community energy projects.

5 Support and Communications

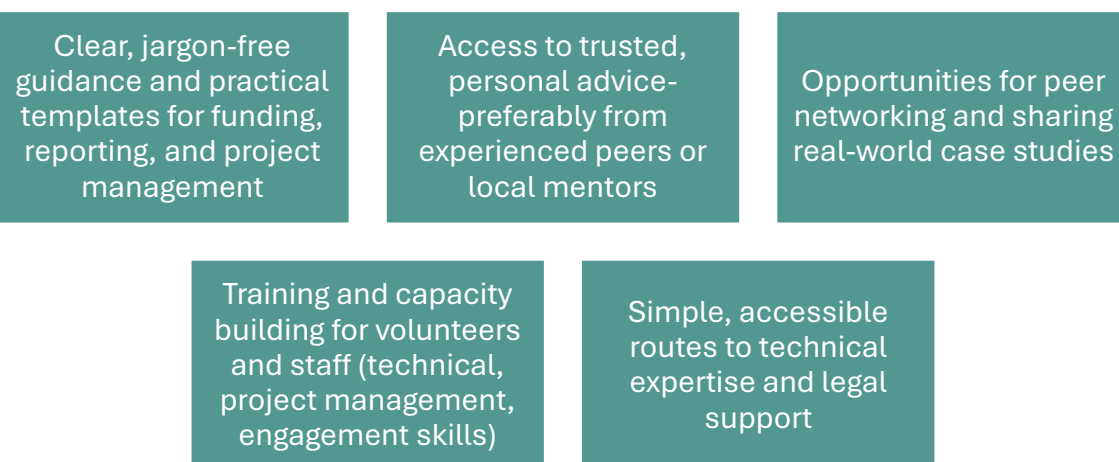
5.1 Introduction

One of the key areas explored, particularly through the research interviews and workshop, was what support and communications community energy groups wanted to access and what in format they wanted that to be. Looking through the lens of the four community energy characterisations, there were a number of types of both support and communications preferences identified that all four of these wanted. These are shown below. Some clear themes emerged across these, which are:

- access to knowledgeable, skilled individuals
- opportunities to share knowledge and experience with peers
- clear and simple materials, templates, guidance.

There were also some differences between the four characterisations, of the type of support they most valued and their preferences in communications styles – see table 3.

5.2 Support – What All Groups Want



5.3 Communication Preferences – All Groups

Personal contact is highly valued: direct conversations, mentoring, and feedback build confidence

Peer-to-peer learning: site visits, networking events, and informal advice from other groups

Written materials should be concise, plain-language, and tailored to community groups (not technical specialists)

Online resources are useful, but can be overwhelming-groups want curated, signposted information

Practical examples and model documents are preferred over lengthy guidance notes

5.4 Support - Key Differences Identified

Table 3. Support and communications differences

Group Type	Most Valued Support	Preferred Communication Style
Other Community Group	Simple guides, personal contact. Funding checklists, admin help, peer mentoring	Direct advice, practical templates, One-to-one, peer learning, local
Developing CE Group	Grant funding, specialist advice, mentoring	Peer networks, model documents
Emerging CE Group	Step-by-step handbooks, templates, “friend to call”	Personal mentoring, signposting
Established CE Group	Revenue funding, advanced templates, procurement guidance	Professional, concise, peer-led

6 Resource Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The following community energy resources have been identified for each of the four Community Energy Characterisations through the data review, interviews and workshop undertaken during the research. Different resources have been identified as relevant for individual characterisations, and others are relevant to more than one of these. There are a number of resources identified at the start that are useful for all four of the characterisations. Each resource has a title, weblink and short description.

One of the key findings from the interviews undertaken for this research was the frustration of community energy groups, particularly those in the earlier stages of development, that they didn't know where to look for information/support and also a desire for there to be one place where they could access all community energy resources and signposting. The Energy Learning Network is planning to published a comprehensive directory of community energy resources in 2025, so keep your eyes out for that.

6.2 Common to All

There are a number of sources of information that are useful for all of the Community Energy Characterisations described here. These are:

- The Community Energy England website, which provides a huge range of resources and information on the community energy sector that is useful for groups at different stages: communityenergyengland.org/
- The annual State of the Sector report of community energy in England, by Community Energy England, in collaboration with Community Energy Wales and Community Energy Scotland provides a review of community energy in the UK: <https://communityenergyengland.org/pages/state-of-the-sector>
- Community Energy in Action: Demonstrating the value of community-led solutions to net zero, The Energy Learning Network (2025): https://ashden.org/storage/2025/03/ELN-Community_Energy_in_Action.
- Devon County Council (2021), [Socio-economic benefits of community energy](#)

Note: The Energy Learning Network is planning to published a comprehensive directory of community energy resources and support in 2025. The following lists provided a suggested Top 10 for initial signposting to groups and should be used in conjunction with the forthcoming comprehensive index.

6.3 Established Community Energy Group

These groups are experienced and professional but face strategic challenges around long-term sustainability, succession planning, recruitment, and managing large-scale, complex projects. Their needs focus on revenue funding for capacity, high-level financial and legal tools, and support for diversification and growth.

Resource	Rationale
Community Energy England: Working Groups https://communityenergyengland.org/pages/working-groups	Advanced peer forums on heat, ethical sourcing, and more
Community Energy England: Policy and Advocacy Sector leadership, influencing policy, and sector-wide collaboration communityenergyengland.org/pages/policy-and-advocacy	Sector leadership, influencing policy, and sector-wide collaboration
Energy Learning Network (Ashden, CSE, CEE) ashden.org/energy-learning-network/	Advanced learning, mentoring, and sharing best practice
Community Energy England: Securing the Best Price for Your Power communityenergyengland.org/news/securing-the-best-price-for-your-power-a-guide-for-community-energy-groups-in-england	In-depth guide for groups with generation assets
Community Energy England: National Map communityenergyengland.org/pages/community-energy-map	Connect with other established groups for partnership and peer support.
Community Energy England: Annual Reports and Governance Best practice in governance, transparency, and reporting https://communityenergyengland.org/pages/who-we-are	Best practice in governance, transparency, and reporting
Community Energy England: Funding Opportunities Capital and revenue funding for mature projects and organisational sustainability communityenergyengland.org/pages/funding-opportunities	Capital and revenue funding for mature projects and

	organisational sustainability
Community Energy England: Community Energy in Action (PDF) Insights, case studies, and sector analysis for established groups communityenergyengland.org/files/document/1038/1743511912_ELN-Community_Energy_in_Action.pdf	Insights, case studies, and sector analysis for established groups
Community Energy Pathways: Leadership and Capacity Building https://communityenergypathways.org.uk/new-name-new-opportunities/	Support for groups professionalising and expanding their impact
Centre for Sustainable Energy: My Community www.cse.org.uk/my-community/	Specialist support for advanced project delivery and community engagement

6.4 Developing Community Energy Group

This group has some experience but faces challenges in scaling up, professionalising its operations, and managing the significant volunteer time required. They need support with funding for more complex stages, securing specialist expertise, and improving their administrative capacity.

Resource	Rationale
Designing and Developing Your Project (Community Energy England) https://communityenergyengland.org/how-to-pages/designing-planning-a-community-energy-project	Project development resources, legal toolkits, and technology guides
Community Energy England: Working Groups https://communityenergyengland.org/pages/working-groups	Thematic working groups for peer learning and advanced topics (e.g., heat, ethical sourcing)
Community Energy England: National Map communityenergyengland.org/pages/community-energy-map	Find and connect with other groups for collaboration and learning
Community Energy England: Securing the Best Price for Your Power communityenergyengland.org/news/securing-the-best-price-for-your-power-a-guide-for-community-energy-groups-in-england	Guide to Power Purchase Agreements and selling your electricity
Community Energy England: Funding Opportunities communityenergyengland.org/pages/funding-opportunities	Targeted at groups ready to move beyond initial grants
Community Energy England: Policy and Advocacy communityenergyengland.org/pages/policy-and-advocacy	Updates and resources for groups engaging in policy or advocacy work
Community Energy Pathways: Capacity Building communityenergypathways.org.uk/new-name-new-opportunities/	Support for groups scaling up, including governance and business planning
Energy Learning Network (Ashden, CSE, CEE) https://ashden.org/energy-learning-network/	Webinars and peer mentoring for groups growing their impact

Community Shares (Co-ops UK, in partnership with Locality and Plunkett UK) https://www.uk.coop/support-your-co-op/community-shares	As groups look to scale up, community share offers become a viable funding option. This web resource offer guidance and platforms to help groups run professional and transparent offers.
Community Energy Legal Toolkit (Devon County Council) www.devon.gov.uk/energyandclimatechange/community-energy-legal-toolkit	Flowcharts and template legal documents for solar, wind, and hydro projects. (Note these documents were produced in 2015, so will not provide all up to date information for each of the renewable energy types, but can provide a useful overview of steps). Further legal guidance is recommended.

6.5 Emerging Community Energy Group

Members of this group are enthusiastic but new to the sector's technical and commercial aspects. They face challenges knowing where to start, finding support, and bridging knowledge gaps. Their primary need is for practical, simplified guidance, mentoring, and access to templates to build their confidence and competence.

Resource	Rationale
Getting Started with Community Energy (Community Energy England): communityenergyengland.org/how-to-pages/getting-started-with-community-energy	Introductory guide and links for new groups
Community Energy England: New to Community Energy?: https://communityenergyengland.org/pages/getting-started	Overview and signposting for those exploring community energy for the first time
10 Step Guide (Community Energy London): www.communityenergy.london/10-step-guide/	Step-by-step guide for setting up a group and launching your first project
Community Energy in Action (Energy Learning Network) communityenergyengland.org/files/document/1038/1743511912_ELN-Community_Energy_in_Action.pdf	Introductory document on the principles and benefits of community energy
The Energy Learning Network (Ashden, CSE, CEE) ashden.org/energy-learning-network/	Peer learning, mentoring, and webinars for groups at any stage
My Community (Centre for Sustainable Energy) https://www.cse.org.uk/my-community/	Resource hub for community groups tackling energy and sustainability

Community Energy England: Funding Opportunities communityenergyengland.org/pages/funding-opportunities	Regularly updated list of grants and funding for new groups
Guides and Resources for Community Energy (West of England Combined Authority) www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/guides-and-resources-for-community-energy/	Directory of local support, funding, and case studies
Community Energy Pathways: Support for New Groups communityenergypathways.org.uk/new-name-new-opportunities/	Practical support for forming and formalising new community energy groups
Urgent Energy Advice for Village Halls (ACRE) acre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Urgent-energy-advice-for-village-halls-October-2022.pdf	Practical tips for community buildings starting to think about energy

6.6 Other Community Group

This type of group is trusted and embedded in the community but is not an energy expert. They are motivated by practical needs like cutting costs for their building. They are cautious and need clear, simple guidance, trusted partners, and support that doesn't overwhelm their limited volunteer capacity.

Resource	Rationale
Getting Started with Community Energy (Community Energy England) communityenergyengland.org/how-to-pages/getting-started-with-community-energy	Simple, accessible guide for any group exploring energy projects
My Community (Centre for Sustainable Energy) www.cse.org.uk/my-community/	Practical support for non-specialist community groups
Guides and Resources for Community Energy (West of England Combined Authority) www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/guides-and-resources-for-community-energy/	Directory of support and funding for community groups
Urgent Energy Advice for Village Halls (ACRE) acre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Urgent-energy-advice-for-village-halls-October-2022.pdf	Energy saving tips for community buildings and halls
Community Energy England: Funding Opportunities communityenergyengland.org/pages/funding-opportunities	Information on grants and small pots for community groups
Community Energy Pathways: Support for New Groups communityenergypathways.org.uk/new-name-new-opportunities/	Help for any group with an interest in energy, including those just exploring
10 Step Guide (Community Energy London) www.communityenergy.london/10-step-guide/	Accessible steps for any group considering energy projects
Community Energy England: National Map communityenergyengland.org/pages/community-energy-map	Find groups in your area to visit or learn from

Energy Learning Network (Ashden, CSE, CEE) ashden.org/energy-learning-network/	Webinars and peer learning for all levels, including non-specialists
Community Energy England: Who We Are communityenergyengland.org/pages/who-we-are	Overview of the sector and how your group can get involved

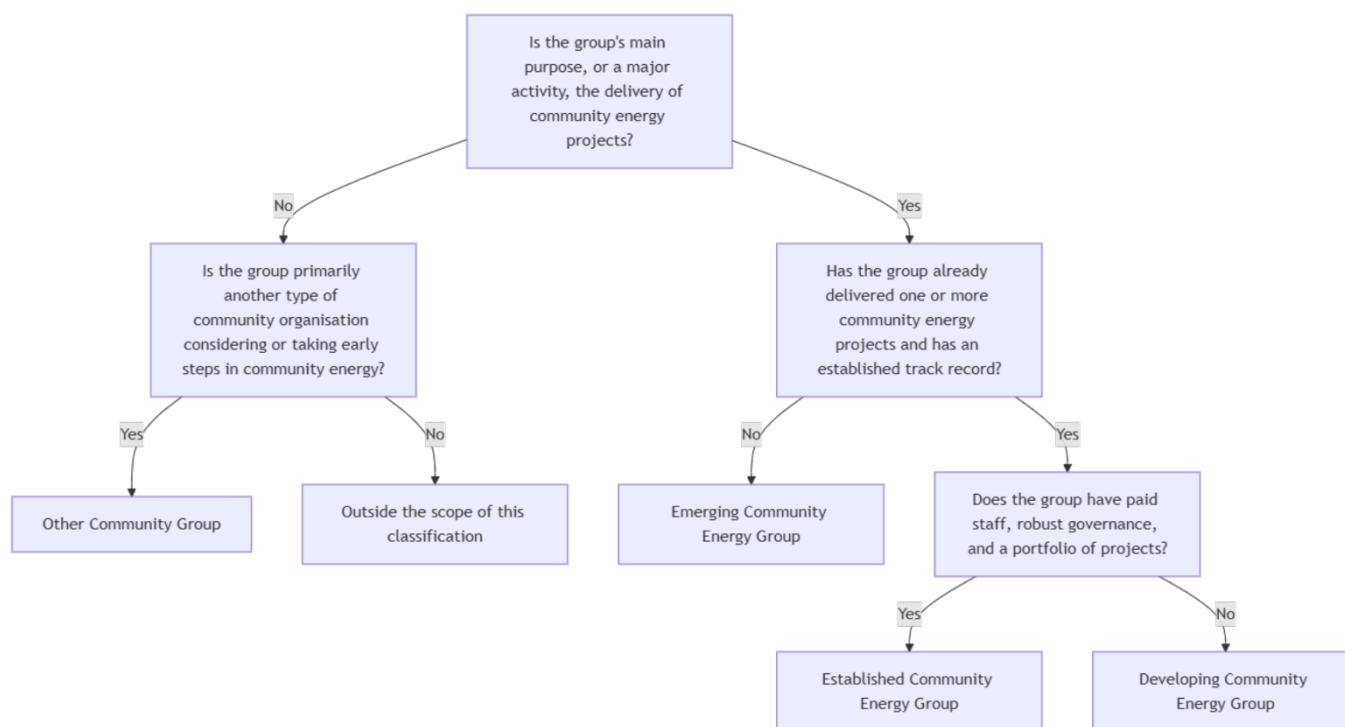
Appendix 1 Methodology

The key research methodology for this project was as follows:

1. Research and data gathering
 - Desk research of existing secondary data.
 - Five initial draft personas were developed based on the desk based research.
 - 17 in-depth semi-structure, qualitative online interviews were conducted with community energy organisations, community groups and infrastructure organisations. These gathered insights into the values, barriers, challenges, background and information needs of different individuals and organisations likely to be already involved in, or likely to engage in forming a Community Energy project. Gratuity payments were available to individuals taking part in the research in a voluntary capacity.
2. Development of final community energy personas
 - Further analysis of data gathered in the tasks above was undertaken to refine the draft persona descriptions, including demographics, organisation types, motivations, challenges, information sources used, information needs.
 - An interactive online workshop was held, with community energy experts and stakeholders to test, validate and enhance the five persona descriptions and available resources for these.
3. Tailoring of content to each persona
 - Insights from Tasks 2 above were used to further refine the personas, leading to the four characterisations contained in this report and identification of the most relevant information/materials for each.

Appendix 2 Decision Tree for Classifying Groups

The following questions and decision tree can be used to classify groups into the characterisations detailed earlier in this document.



Legend:

- Emerging Community Energy Group**
 New, volunteer-led, learning as they go, no paid staff.
- Developing Community Energy Group**
 Some projects delivered, growing, mostly volunteers, aspiring to professionalise.
- Established Community Energy Group**
 Multiple projects, paid staff, robust governance, sector leaders.
- Other Community Group**
 Main focus is not community energy, but may be considering or already running small energy projects as a side activity.
- Outside the scope of this classification**



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